Vol. VI. Numb. 87

THE OBSERVATOR.

A Letter to the Observator, *about chusing our Representatives by Ballot. His Opinion about it; and Advice to our Electors, about chusing Members, and giving them Instructions. With his Thoughts, by the Way, about our Constitution.*

From Saturday, December 27. to Wednesday, December 31. 1707.

Country-m. MAster, here's a Letter to you from a Gentleman, proposing a Method to prevent Abuses in electing Members of Parliament.

Obs. Read it, *Roger*.

Country-m. I will, Master; 'tis thus:

SIR,

"THere is now before the House of Commons, "a Bill to prevent Bribery and corrupt Practices in electing Members of Parliament, and "daily Experience shews it to be the most necessary Bill imaginable, and it is esteem'd so by all "those that love the Liberties and Priviledges of "*Great Britain*. What Methods the Wisdom of "that Honourable Assembly proposes, I know not, "but this I am sure of, that whilst the Generality "of People are so over-aw'd with the Threats and "Fears of Parties, there cannot be chosen a Parliament agreeable to the Liberties of *Great Britain*, "whose Subjects, in that Respect, are many times "kept in as great Slavery as those of the miserable "Nations that know nothing of the Sweetness of "Liberty by the Enjoyment. The Method of Punishments inflicted on insolent Officers, for A-"buses, or on Clerks, *&c.* for false Returns, (which "hath been a too common Practice of late) tho' it "be highly reasonable, and exceeding necessary, "yet has not altogether reach'd the present Case; "whilst those, whose Property it is to make a free "and impartial Choice, are over-aw'd with the "Threats and Fears, either of the Candidates im-"mediately concern'd, or of their Adherents, or "else are byas'd by private Interests, from chusing "Representatives according to the real Inclination "of their Hearts.

"Therefore, in my poor Opinion, it would ex-"ceedingly redound to the Honour of this present "Parliament, and the Safety and Happiness of *Great* "*Britain* in general, were the whole Kingdom ob-"lig'd by a Law, to chuse Representatives by Bal-"lotting; by which every Member makes an im-"partial Choice of such as they best approve, with-"out giving Offence to any of the other Candi-"dates. I think this is the most effectual Me-"thod to prevent Bribery, and excite all those that "sit in the Honourable House, to recommend them-"selves by their Services to the Choice of the Peo-"ple, when personal Merit is preferr'd before par-"ty Interests. It would give the Subject that Li-"berty which is the Property of a *Britain*. A Man "might then vote according to his Conscience, "without being turn'd out of his Livelihood, "when no Candidate knows who is for him, and "who against him. I apprehend there can be no "solid Argument against this in generous Minds, "nor any Difficulty in the Performance of this "Method, but what might be easily remov'd, as I "could demonstrate.

Obs. In my Opinion, *Roger*, the Gentleman writes very much to the Purpose. The getting of Votes for Members of Parliament, by undue Means, such as Bribery, Treating, *&c.* notwithstanding the good Laws against it, is frequently complain'd of, and if timely Remedy be not provided, is like to become a National Grievance. I must likewise add, that there has been, we know the Time when, too much of Party, both in Complaints of that Nature, and in the Decisions upon them, which is our Shame, as well as Misfortune: Therefore I could heartily wish, if our Superiors see no Objection against it, that Ballotting were introduc'd in all Elections thro' the Kingdom. We are but too sensible, in this City, of the Expence the common Method has frequently put the Citizens to, and of the unhappy Ferments, and notorious Injustice occasion'd among us at Elections, by party Quarrels, and private Views; and I am fully of Opinion, that Ballotting would be one of the best and easiest Methods to prevent it.

Country-m. But, is that Method practis'd in any wise Government, Master?

Obs. Yes, *Roger*, it is practis'd in one of the most ancient, wise, and steady Governments in *Europe*, I mean *Venice*; where the noble *Venetians* are so powerful, that 'tis dangerous for those of the inferior Sort to disoblige them: Therefore, in all their Elections for Members of the Great Council of the Republick, which must consist of the Nobility, they chuse by Ballot. And Sheriff *Bethel*, in his *Interest of Princes and States*, makes this Observation upon it, "That Merit has a great Influence up-"on those Elections; and that tho' they be lewd "enough there, as in most other Popish Countries, "that wise People never employs a Man observ'd "to be a common Haunter of Stews, a Drunkard, "or exorbitantly given over to his Lusts and Plea-"sures; for they believe such Men to be good for "nothing.

Country-m. Aye, but Master, 'twill be objected, that the Methods of a Republick are not fit for a Monarchy.

Obs. That's a trifling Objection, *Roger*. I propose no Change in our Constitution, which I do verily believe to be much better than theirs, could we keep to it; but since Election of Members to our Great Council, is our Birth-right, as well as 'tis theirs, I only propose this Way of Ballotting, as a proper Method for preserving that Freedom of Election which we are entitl'd to; for as the Gentleman very well observes, this prevents the Elector from being under the Awe of any Person or Party, and gives him full Liberty to chuse according to his Conscience, without Fear of offending any Man, or of losing any Thing by it.

Country-m. Then, Master, I wish with all my Heart it were practis'd among us: It would prevent the selling of Votes by such guzzling Fellows as I have heard of, who *swore they would vote for the Gentleman whose Barrel was tapp'd at both Ends*; for we have too many People among us, who will sell their Birth-right for a Skinful of Drink, as *Esau* sold his for a Mess of Pottage. But since this Method is rather to be wish'd, than hop'd for, pray, Master, give a Word of Advice to our Electors, in their present Circumstances.

Obs. Your Advice and mine won't signify much, *Roger*; however, I shall freely give it, out of Respect to my Country; and 'tis thus: That our Electors would take care to chuse Men of Estates, or at least, of Probity and Parts, and not let any Popish Country rise up in Judgment against us; who,

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as we have just now heard, think Men that are openly vitious, to be good for nothing; for those who live in avow'd Rebellion to the Law of God, cannot in Reason be expected to be good Patriots or Subjects. In the next Place, I would wish them to have no Regard to any of those Denominations into which we are unhappily divided, but to be satisfy'd as to the Probity and Ability of the Person, provided always they take care to chuse none who are known to be Enemies to her Majesty's Title, to the Succession as establish'd in the Protestant Line, or to the Peace of the Nation, with Respect to our Differences about Religion: And in the last Place, that they would chuse none who may lie under a Temptation, by Post, Place, Pension, or Friendship, to act contrary to the Interest of their Country.

Country-m. Take care, Master: the Tools and Emissaries of some Folks, will call you hard Names.

Obs. That Sort of People, *Roger*, is the Bane of the Nation; and were it in their Power, would whisper, tattle, and wheedle us out of our Religion, and Liberty too. The best Way to defeat them, is, to treat their Advice with Contempt, and to enquire narrowly into the Characters of such Persons as they recommend. What I say, is spoke with a tender Regard to our Constitution. It's the Duty of every Subject of this Kingdom, to avoid what may bring the legislative and executive Power, or the Ballance of it, into the Hands of any one Person or Party; for the Moment that happens, we lose our Constitution, and must submit to whatever any future Court shall think fit to impose upon us. The Kingdom of *France*, and others, who had free Parliaments as well as we, but are now depriv'd of them, are speaking Instances of this; and that it was chiefly effected by getting a Majority of Courtiers, and such as depended upon them, into Parliaments, is too evident from History and Fact, to be deny'd.

Country-m. Well, Master, I foresee, that some People will say you are an Enemy to the Government; that you allow too much to the Parliament, and too little to the Crown.

Obs. There's no Man free, *Roger*, from the Reflections of Malice and Faction; but the Thing speaks for it self. The Government of this Kingdom is known to be by Soveraign and Parliament, and as he would deservedly be call'd an Enemy to the Government, who should plead for taking the executive Power from the Crown, or putting the Ballance of it into the Hands of the Parliament, in like manner he deserves to be call'd an Enemy to the Government, who would take the Ballance of the Legislature, and raising of Money from the Parliament, and put it in the Power of the Crown. Now, all that I argue for, *Roger*, is, that the Ballance may be kept even as our Constitution enjoins; and I can't help thinking, that those who chuse such Men for Representatives, as are under a Temptation to vote what way any Court would have them, do as much as in them lies to overturn our Government, and dismember our Soveraignty, as Sir *Robert Filmer*, in his *Patriarcha*, and others of his Kidney, did, when they said, *it was left to the Discretion of our Soveraigns, whom to summon to Parliament, and whom not; and that it is their due Right, by their Letters, to ordain such Commissioners for Shires, and such Commissioners for Burroughs, as they shall think fit to name.* Not that I think we are in any Hazard during the Reign of her Majesty, whose Piety and Uprightness sets her above all Suspicion of that Nature; but Presidents are dangerous, because Mankind is frail, and the best of Princes are liable to be impos'd upon by their own Passions, and the Advices of designing and crafty Ministers, as is plain from the Instance of *David* the holiest, and *Solomon* the wisest of Kings; and yet we find by the sacred History, that their Administration was not free from Sallies of arbitrary Power. The Cases of *Mephibosheth*, *Uriah*, and *Bathsheba*, and of *numbering the People*, are evident Proofs against *David*, and the *multiplying of Wives, Concubines, Horse-men, Chariots*, &c. *and oppressing the People to maintain them*, are as strong against *Solomon*. Nay, the very Heathens, by the meer Light of Nature, have discover'd the Falshood of such Schemes of Government, as put all in the Power of the Prince. Thus *Aristotle*, in his Politicks, *Lib.* 1. *Cap.* 2. says, *That a Prince, who ruleth himself and others by his own Appetite and Affection, is, of all Creatures, the worst, and of all Beasts, the most furious and dangerous.* And *Lib.* 3. *Cap.* 12. *That he who joins a Law to govern with the Prince, joins God to the Prince; but he that joins Affection to govern with the Prince, joins a Beast with him.*

Country-m. Well, Master, I think there's a great deal in what you say; but since Men, who are true and steady to our Constitution, are not always to be found, what do ye advise our Electors to do in that Case.

Obs. My Advice to them, *Roger*, is this, That they should prepare Instructions for their Representatives, and order them particularly to take Care of our *Trade, foreign and domestick*, of our *Fleet and Sea-men*, of our *Constitution, as a limited Monarchy*, particularly of our *Freedom of Elections*, of the *Protestant Succession as by Law establish'd*, of the *Management of the War*, and the *Money* we give to carry it on, that it be *duely apply'd*, that we pay no more than our *just Proportion with our Allies*, least this Kingdom be made a *Milch Cow* to our Popish Allies, as it was formerly to the *Popish Church*; and that in any ensuing Treaty, there be Care taken of our *Trade to* Spain *and the* West Indies, *&c.* least, as by the Treaty of *Ryswick*, we be left to enjoy the Honour of *doing most*, and *getting least* by the War; and that above all, there be *sufficient Ties* put upon the *French* King, to give no *Assistance directly or indirectly to the* St. Germains *Family, in making good their Claim to our Soveraignty*; for we may all remember well enough, that as our Protestant Brethren beyond Sea, were expos'd to very great Hardships, by being neglected in that Treaty, there was no *farther Care taken of our Succession*, than just *during the Life of his late Majesty*.

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